

MULTI-CHANNEL MARKETING IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

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Article Received on
01 Feb. 2018,
Revised on 22 Feb. 2018,
Accepted on 12 March 2018
DOI: 10.20959/wjpr20187-11470

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ABSTRACT

Multi-channel marketing is a practice of customer interaction using different channels of communication and letting the customers take action by using those channels. It can be simplified as the customer's choice (SAS, 2015). MCM for every company is important to be with the customers and for the customers. The expenditure on MCM is 3 to 4 times more compared to single-channel marketing. The present-day customers have more options to buy and are more opinionated regarding the things they want to buy. And the customers have a control over the buying process than the marketers. The information about a product can be obtained by various means. The increasing importance of the multi-channel marketing is a natural way the information is consumed by the customers and in the current evolving world, it is a way to explain the changes that are affecting the

healthcare industry. Companies are finding different ways to reach customers and one of its kind is the multi-channel marketing which includes reaching out to the customers through websites, mailing catalogs, emails, postal mails, mobile tests etc. But, many companies lack the idea of how to execute the ways to succeed and implement multi-channel marketing for their companies. This paper focuses on the impact of multi-channel marketing on pharmaceutical companies, and if the companies are being benefited and satisfied by this kind of marketing and what steps the companies need to take to be successful from its competitors in the multi-channel marketing of its products.

KEYWORDS: Multi-channel marketing, Pharmaceutical companies, Customers, Products.

Multi-channel marketing

“Consumers these days have far more control over what they consume in the way of marketing than they did in the past. It’s now easy for them to “tune out” messages that don’t come in their preferred format or on their favorite channels” (Couch, 2017).

Multi-channel marketing is all about developing an effective way of letting the customers know about your brand’s story (Sophie, 2016). It is a way of broadcasting the products to the customers on a regular basis. different kinds of communication in multi-channel marketing includes.

- Web portals
- Social media
- Mobile applications
- E-mail and letter correspondence
- Conferences
- Webinars
- Sales representatives at face-to-face meetings (Sophie, 2016)

Widening the strategy of communication is making the content remain new and fresh and reaching out to public and well-known colleagues to promote the products. Generating specialized applications which will attract new generations is a positive way of reaching out to younger generations.

Most of the pharmaceutical companies are not familiar with MCM in the current digital world. In the current days, MCM changed the entire scenario of a sales approach. From a research by the Boston consulting group, it was found that, 55% of the pharma companies are not satisfied with their efforts in multi-channel marketing. The companies are lacking marketing strategies which is lagging them behind. As the amount of marketing platforms are growing, the companies need to embrace this kind of marketing in the industry which will be a great idea to increase sales. All the pharma companies have necessary information to get started with multi-channel marketing and they have to find a right way to use them. Pharma companies have to consider three things to integrate multi-channel marketing.

1. Deciding how to build personal relationships.
2. Choosing the correct combination of digital tools and marketing channels.
3. Use of big data analytics (Adagio, 2015).

Without all these, it is not possible to build a framework to execute and implement multi-channel marketing in pharma companies. It is not only updating the infrastructure but also the information systems and digital skills needs to be updated which is the only way to move the concept of MCM to a reality. The reasons for the pharma industry to score less on MCM is:

1. Lack of integration of marketing channels
2. Lack of knowledge on choosing effective channels for reaching out to the physicians for marketing (Adagio, 2015).

Integration between different channels of marketing

Pharma companies which are using MCM should have an interaction and integrate with other channels of marketing to ensure that the information about the products provided is accurate and correct and is not overlapped. All the information should look and feel alike. The marketing teams should share the data and integrate their messaging strategies for better results and that they are focusing on the same key information is being conveyed to the customers. To ensure that the data is integrated, a single or unified platform is used on which the data can be analyzed and stored. The company have the right to segment the customer base and can develop target campaigns and promotions along with the partners to market the products. Adopting MCM systems will help the pharmaceutical representatives to engage more efficiently with the healthcare professionals through different mediums in a unified way which leads to increased engagement of the target audience (Sophie, 2016).

Essentials of pharmaceutical multi-channel marketing

Many pharma companies struggle with the launch of their products and have no idea of how it impacts its sales. For this reason, the MCM is the effect way of marketing the products. The path of success entails more integration and results in an impact that is measurable and tangible (David, 2016). The six essential components to become successful in MCM are.

1. Medical sales representative is the key

Medical sales representative is the backbone for any pharmaceutical company. Rep is the main element who represents the company in front of the customers. Communications will not be proper without a rep. a health care provider will share most of the information with the rep than any other sources. Other channels of marketing are not much prominent with the health care providers as they prefer talking in person with the reps rather than to reply the emails or surveys or questionnaires sent regarding a product. The role of a medical sales representative is a traditional way of marketing used from ancient times and is still the best

way to market the products of a pharma company. In recent years, the evolution of digital media and different channels of marketing did not replace the traditional way of using reps. When a medical sales representative is involved in the multi-channel marketing, a healthcare provider believes in other channels and share more information with the reps.

2. Customers are individuals

Every customer is different from each other. They have different channels they prefer to look for the products. There are customers with different priorities, different knowledge bases and different patient kinds. When a healthcare provider receives any relevant information from the pharma companies across the channels, they give much priority and pay more attention in answering to the customers and therefore we can gain information and earn time of the HCP.

3. Marketing strategy is important

The different channel mix, modulation and topic should be changed according to the priorities and context of the brand. It should not only depend on the customers. Customization of the channel mix is essential and makes MCM succeed.

4. Everything changes with time

Time is everything and what works it is will not be the same tomorrow. The updating of data and the strategic development of a process should be continuous. Developing and updating strategies is the key and collecting data is the important step in developing new strategies.

5. Technology is an enabler but not a solution

Technology is a necessary tool in every field and with all these technology tools and marketing channels, it is still the work of the humans to execute the ideas. It is not the work of a machine to execute it and man power is necessary in the execution. Technology-human interaction makes everything possible in the current days.

6. Walk before you run

The relationship between a rep and MCM is crucial as this relation is essential for the benefit of the organization. There are three elements that need to be taken care of in this rep-MCM coordination process: an easily achievable goal, high visibility across the organization and the use of the case that represents the decision scope for the reps (David, 2016).

Management of MCM efforts

Most of the pharma companies are still experimenting with the available digital channels. There is a significant change in the pharma industry due to the increase in the role of the digital channels and technology. These digital technologies are replacing the traditional channels of marketing with the healthcare professionals. Most of the pharma companies are trying to adapt the new channels of marketing to reach out to their customers but are lacking the expertise in using them. There are four stages in multi-channel marketing according to a survey done on international pharma companies in Germany in 2014 October which includes prerequisites, strategy, implementation and monitoring.

1. Prerequisites: The prerequisites for a successful multichannel marketing in pharma companies are trusting in the abilities of their MCM network and usage. The companies have to believe the employees of the organization who are involved in marketing for a long period of time. The second prerequisite is maintaining a management board which actively deals with the marketing channels and knowing about the new channels. A management team is necessary for managing the employees of the organization and also monitoring operations of the company. The third prerequisite is having a department which is central and has a higher rank and allocation of sufficient budget for the campaigns of multi-channel marketing. Many successful companies hire their ex-employees to supervise the current operations like marketing and production. Having an ex-MCM manager with a higher rank will be beneficial for the company and also, they can have an idea on assigning the budget for MCM departments and help support them in implementing the MCM activities. Overall, the MCM should have a greater and significant impact in the organization (Staritz Matthias, 2015).

2. Strategy: Many successful companies have their strategies which trigger the launch of MCM in their organizations. Most of the companies have started using digital channels very actively to reach the competitive advantage approach rather than a reactive approach with their competitors. The major force for launching the MCM activities are cost reduction and this strategy is mostly followed by many global companies which started using MCM. These companies have started the concept of MCM with a strategy focusing on business unit level. Key performance indicators are used to track the companies' performance through MCM. The companies that are successful express the reason of their success lies in the management board and the employees who clearly understood the concept of MCM and worked hard to achieve the goals (Staritz Matthias, 2015).

3. Implementation: Change management and sales team collaborating with MCM are the success factors for the implementation of multi-channel campaigns. Internal trainings for the employees of the organization, and involving the sales department in the digital channel activities are the implementation plans that the companies have taken. Successful companies have connection between MCM and the stakeholders which resulted in a professional and sustainable multi-channel marketing strategy. Coordination between the departments is another success strategy that the successful companies states for the implementation of multi-channel marketing campaigns (Staritz Matthias, 2015).

4. Monitoring: The activities of the MCM should be monitored and their performance needs to be measured. Most of the successful global companies use KPI's to monitor the MCM activities and the performance of the company. Successful MCM projects have indicators like ROI, marketing costs, customer coverage, customer satisfaction, internal processes optimization and increase or decrease in the marketing costs. Self-assessment methods are used to measure these factors as they cannot be measured directly (Staritz Matthias, 2015).

Measurement and evaluation

The important aspect of MCM is measuring, recording and analyzing the results. Without a correct measure, the success of the MCM campaign cannot be calculated. To measure the MCM, different aspects can be used like level of access, quality of interactions, feedbacks and cross channel activation.

The main reason for the MCM is the difficulty in the level of access to doctors and healthcare providers. Research shows that, most of the doctors who refuse to meet reps are more interested in connecting through channels. So, the more channels a pharma company uses, the greater access and engagement to the doctor is achieved. The access levels need to be monitored to avoid any disruptions in the channels that may occur.

The increase of internet in has become more prevalent these days and it has become a synonym for poor quality communication. The quality of interactions is an important aspect in encouraging the users to engage in the information that multi channels provide. The quality of interaction is important without which it is difficult to attain customer attention. The response of the customers can be measured using satisfaction surveys and questionnaires.

This will help us know if the information provided for the customers is of good quality and is useful to satisfy their needs.

Feedback is the key for any project. The essence of MCM lies in the integration with other channels. By delivering a same message through several channels, it is possible to get good results and also the sum of the whole is better and more than the individual parts. Closing the loop with feedbacks from the customers is an important part of MCM. The evaluation is done through feedback and measuring the customer's responses and assessing their accuracy using statistical data will give the information that is necessary to flex the approach. Adapting to the MCM strategy that is developed by the company is the only way to acquire the results.

CONCLUSION

MCM for pharmaceutical industry needs to be more improved by involving employees with expertise and dedication in the sales teams. Sales teams have to help the healthcare providers by finding ways to navigate the changes which looks extremely difficult. This can be done by focusing on the content, messaging and services which help them be relevant in the market and also help the customers to find the information they need. By developing coordinating marketing strategies which targets the customers based on how they are utilizing the technology and delivering the correct messages at the right time they needed will help the pharma companies to boost up the competition in the MCM market. The pharma companies also have to ensure that the functionality across all the channels and the devices is working and have to keep pace with the technology. Developing support programs for the customers who cannot use the technology much and launching client services for the customers in desperate need of information will help the companies see success. The companies also have to hold on to the data which is necessary for measuring the success and also to maintain customer relationship management practices. Customers with a strong internet presence creates credibility and will have an up-to-date knowledge of the products and the companies becoming cyber citizens will be helpful for the MCM campaign. By achieving all these, the pharmaceutical industry can attain a part in the competitive advantage and to attain this, the companies requires to have a skilled and expert marketing team and a tech team. The pharma companies are not very much satisfied with the MCM campaigns but by educating the sales team and the employees about the benefits of MCM, the companies can reap benefits..

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